

A Whip for the Colonel

By Alexander Key author of "Fortune Has Horns"

A tale of the days when Tarle-ton's Redcoats rode roughshod through Carolina.

IT SEEMS like yesterday, but my grandfather got it from his grandfather, who was there that night at the stag at McQueen's and who watched how the tide of history was turned because a little man wouldn't down a drink.

They say he was a hard-bitten young devil, my grandfather's grandfather, quick with his fists and his tongue, freckled and sandy and with the same blue glitter in his eye that all the James men have; a captain in the Second Militia at twenty-two, and he could ride horse with men like Morgan and Harry Lee. He knew them all, those great ones of the Revolution that you never hear tell about—Black McDonald and. Crabstick, John Laurens and the Horry boys, and George Dennison who sang ballads he'd made up in the swamps at night. Gavin was in the Brigade with the rest of them.

But it started at McQueen's. The house stood just around the corner on Tradd Street, and when old Alec McQueen -gave one of. his dinners—they the talk of Charles Town, as people still know the place—he'd lock the doors and windows, give each guest what he liked, and have him under -the table by cock's crow. He'd keep a servant or two to boot back and forth to the tap room, and as long as he was he'd waddle around, discarding peruke, ruffles or waistcoat with every other drink, and all the while his sly eyes would be on the lookout for gentle sipper. A man learned to drink McQueen's.

I can see the place as if I'd been there with young Gavin: the spring night outside fragrant with honeysuckle and magnolias, and the city strangely quiet after three weeks of cannonading; the big drawing room reeking of pomatum and. spirits; a hundred food odors drift-ing from the littered dining room, thickening a staleness already too thick from sputtering tapers and tobacco.

And there was the clink of glass and mug and demijohn; the low, satisfied murmur of a score of fine gentlemen preparing to forget a blackguard named Clinton and become properly insensible before morning....

GAVIN JAMES was uneasy. It was not so much that the room was too hot, and that he was the only young man present. The thing was something he couldn't put his finger on, and it had crept in from the sweet night be-yond the barred windows. He sprawled in a corner, keeping one eye on the clock and the other on his colonel across the room, and wished he didn't have to mind his liquor. He'd promised, without realizing what it meant, to have the colonel back to the batteries, sober, by midnight. Sober from this place—with every door and window locked and old McQueen pouring the stuff faster than a man could swallow it

It was a wonder how the colonel could hold so much and still keep his feet. He stood in the opposite corner near the ample figure of Mr. Bee, a dark, quiet little man in a militia uni-form so stained and powder-blackened that McQueen's Negro servant wouldn't have worn it. A noggin of rum was always at his lips. He should have been drunk, but his black eyes were awake, watchful, and queerly troubled.

Gavin saw him glance at the clock as McQueen was filling his noggin again. When McQueen turned to look after Poyas Bee, the mystery of the colonel's sobriety was suddenly explained. McQueen, looking slyly back over his shoulder, saw the thing at the same time. It was the beginning, as Gavin realized later, of a curious chain of incidents that was to affect the lives of everyone in the room.

The colonel was caught in the act of tossing five fingers of the best rum in Carolina into the fireplace.

McQueen stared at him. "Bless me!" he muttered, and waddled to the colonel's side. "I say, are ye daft on yere feet? Ye'll he needin' O' that an' more to fight the fevers an' the British!"

Mr. Bee chuckled. "You can't put 'im on the floor, Alec. I've told you 'e's not a drinkin' man!"

'E's 'ere, Poyas, an' 'e'll 'ave to drrrink!" McQueen blinked foggily and without recognition at the colonel while he refilled the noggin. "Come, come, sorrr; the night's afore us! 'Ave a snifter in the right place—a toast to General Ben Lincoln!"

The room quieted. The colonel frowned and his well-cut lips tightened. He raised the noggin slowly, "To Lincoln," he said fervently. "God help him; he needs more than a toast. Another week and he'll be forced to capitulate!"

"Eh?" rasped McQueen. "Capit-ulate? Nonsense! Twice the bloody Britons came yapping' around us an' we' fired their breeches. Now we have Lincoln an' his whole damned arrmy to hold the beggars!"

The colonel's gentle-strong face hardened until it was hawk-like his black eyes flicked over the room with a steel thrust that drove it to dead si-lence. Gavin could hear every watch ticking.

"Mister McQueen; gentlemen," the colonel said quietly, "the devils are at our doorstep. Sir Henry's regulars are on the Ashley and the Neck, and the moment wind and tide favor, Arbuthnot's fleet will be up the channel. Mark me, seh, his guns will blow the city out of the rnarsh. I warn you all to leave while there's still time!"

MCQUEEN'S jaw clicked. "Damn Arbuthnot an' Clinton!" he roared. "Gad, sorr, 'tis no night to turn alarmist! The war's nigh over, an' while we have honor we'll hold the city! Drrink an' drrrown your fears!" He was purpling and he wanted to say more, but the colonel had set off a spark and they were all talking now. Poyas Bee was on his feet shouting.

"Whash dish, Franshis!" cried the burly Poyas—Mr. Poyas Bee, Master of Hounds, who had known the colo-nel for forty years. "Dash treashun, Franshis! Treashun!" He careened over the rug, his wig awry and one thick fist shaking a turkey leg in the colonel's face. "Dishonor'ble talk, Franshis. Don't become your pash rec-ord. No Ca'liny gentleman would run from a li'l noise an' follow the ladies to the country. Why, there's e 'en been Whigs advish Lincoln to retreat an' let the scoundrels have the city!"

"I was one of them," retorted the colonel. "And, by Harry, if I were in command I'd retreat tonight and least save the army!"

"We're glad you're *not* in command," rasped McQueen, abruptly sober. He shrugged. "But come, drink, we have the night—"

"I'll give him a drink!" snapped Poyas. "Then I'm done with him." He flung the contents of his glass into colonel's face.

The little man stood rock-still. Whether he was angry or not Gavin could not tell; but he could see the stinging hurt in him.

"Poyas," he spoke finally. "You're drunk. I forgive you."

"Now, now," muttered McQueen, coming between them, "We be all good Whigs. I beg you, there's nought to pull hair about. Mister Bee was a bit hasty, an' our militiaman no doubt has the interests O' Ca'liny at heart. Come, gentlemen, three whiskeys to patch the matter, an' a demijohn to seal it. Mister Bee, please..."

But Poyas had lumbered away, and young Gavin saw he was beyond conciliation. The clock struck. Gavin caught the colonel's eye and slid to his feet. He approached the colonel and began reciting the little reminder the two had planned between them. "You have the night inspection at twelve, sir, and there's that matter of more sandbags for the south wall. We'd best hurry." It was beyond Gavin, why the colonel should have taken the stand he did when all knew there was nothing to worry about, and why any man, with twenty-four hours leave and in his right mind, would want to leave with so much good liquor untasted. But the colonel had not been himself for a week.

My respects, Mister McQueen," the colonel finished. "If you will pardon our haste—"

"Haste bedamned!" McQueen was indignant. "Faith, old Ben Lincoln knows where ye are; he'd have been here himself if he hadn't had too much of his own rum. Rotten stuff! Gad, sorr, do ye ask me to unlock my doors an' allow ye to leave cold sober? By my faith, I've ne'er done such a thing in thirty years! The keys are hid an' ye can't get out. 'Ere—" He thrust forth a bottle. "Drrrink, Major, an' I'll make

a real Whig O' ye by dawn!"

At McQueen's a gentleman must at least pretend to drink. The colonel tipped the bottle up, and in ten minutes it was half empty and he was staggering with the others. Whether most of the liquor went down his throat or into the urn behind him, Gavin never learned, but when McQueen left for the taproom the colonel nodded sharply and slipped through the hall to examine the rear door. Gavin followed.

The rear door was locked and before they could try the windows Gavin heard McQueen coming. They hurried up the servants' stairway to the upper hall.

Both gallery doors were locked and the colonel swore. But the sewing-room door was ajar; he entered and eased open a window. He was leaning out of it, drinking in the sweet air when Gavin asked him if he wasn't making a mistake by wanting to quit such good company and leave the trouble with Mr. Bee unsettled.

The colonel grunted. "Mistake, lad?" He pointed across the Battery and the harbor where the lights of Arbuthnot's fleet were winking on the horizon.

"There's an inshore wind, if you know the meaning of it. I'm confounded if I'll be caught drunk and napping when all hell's getting ready to pop. I'd hoped to open the eyes of that crowd below—they're important men and that sot Lincoln will do what they say. But there was no chance to talk. They're all daft and blind."

"But, sir, we've been tasting Clin-ton's medicine. It hasn't harmed us. See, they've stopped wasting powder—and the fleet will never dare sail past the fort."

The colonel pulled down a curtain, fastened it to a table leg and heaved it over the sill. "They'll sail if the wind holds. Out with you! There's a power of work ahead before we're ready for them. Would to God I were a bigger man."

GAVIN reached the curtain's end, dropped the remaining few yards to the ground. He had gained his feet when he heard an oath, and was just in time to see the colonel's spare body falling like a plummet, torn curtain clutched in his fingers. He landed in a heap, and there was a queer sound as if some one had stepped upon a dry stick in the woods. The colonel groaned, lay still a moment, then bunt into a cold fit of cursing. He seldom cursed.

He had snapped an ankle bone. As Gavin remembered it, it was as if all the colonel's world and hopes had sud-denly come to an end. He sat there, striking his leg with a clenched fist and shaking his head, such a look of futility on his face as Gavin had never seen. And all at once Gavin understood.

He was a small man, with only a colonel's stripes on his jacket, but Caro-lina was in his heart and his mind and he'd been carrying the weight of her on his shoulders. For a week he'd fought to be listened to—and they'd told him such talk didn't become a man who'd cut a name in the Cherokee wars and been cited for valor in the last siege. Liquor from a lost friend smarted in his eyes. He was a terrier barking at shadows, and now all he had for his trouble was a cracked leg bone. He'd lost his last right. A man can't get out and fight with a broken leg.

Gavin understood, though he did not agree, and he failed to see the writ-ing on the wall until it was too late.

He got the colonel to his rooms, fetched and helped the surgeon, and at the colonel's order went over to headquarters to report.

It was after twelve and he was ex-pecting to see no one there but the night officer. But when the guard ad-mitted him he found that the pot was on the fire, boiling, with much history waiting to be decided. The staff and the engineers were muttering over charts, disheveled and showing the fatigue of weeks; beyond them was a hasty dele-gation of merchants all talking at once and talking loudly, as if they could banish fears with high words and strong opinions. Old Ben Lincoln sat facing them, only half sober, sweat dripping from the turtle creases of his neck. He seemed amused, and his big lower lip was pursed as usual, hold-ing back his thought as well as his quid. Uncertainty showed only in his eyes.

Sir Henry had sent his summons: surrender within twelve hours, or he would blow the town out of sight.

Gavin listened, watching Lincoln vacillate between the frowns of his en-gineers and the insistence

of the delegation. What the engineers advised Gavin didn't know, but the delegation was dear enough. Beneath their Whig fervor and talk of fight was the fear of Lincoln ordering a retreat and leaving Clinton to count spoils.

Lincoln spat, delivering himself of tobacco and words. "All right—all right! If ye don't mind a li'l more shell an' noise, we're standing pat! I'm not runnin' like Washington did at N' York. We'll show 'em who has mettle!"

A faint cheer, and the place quieted to the uneasy whisperings of new fears. Lincoln saw Gavin. "Where's yuh colonel?" he asked.

Gavin told him. Lincoln wagged his head in groggy sympathy that contained a measure of relief. He had a big man's tolerance for the little colonel, though he had found him annoying.

"'Stoo bad, but thas what he gets for turnin' down McQueen's likker. 'Ere—" He scrawled something on a piece of paper. "Pash. In mornin' send 'im out the city, his plantashun. Recu-perate. Thas order, unnerstan'? The fightin' will keep till 'e gets well. Run along now."

GAVIN hurried away, dazed, eager. He was on a dark stage then, before a black curtain that would draw aside at any moment. He could see nothing, though he could sense an approach of something he couldn't grasp. But a fire was in his veins and he envisioned more sorties beyond the lines, his men whooping it up like demons as they clashed with some of Sir Henry's cavalry. Gavin loved war like wine. There was a glory in it then, and honor, and a man was either a clod or a soldier.

The colonel sat propped in bed, bloodless lips compressed, eyes points of hard jet in the candlelight. He heard Gavin through without a word, stared so long at Lincoln's pass that he seemed to be sleeping. It was weeks afterward before Gavin had an inkling what was taking place in his mind.

Abruptly, sharp as a rapier thrust: "Lad, help me up. Help me dress."

But sir, you—you're unable to now! Tomorrow—

"Help me up, I say. Then call for my horse."

Gavin could only stare at him. Your—horse?"

"My horse," snapped the colonel. He struggled to rise, wincing with each movement of his bound leg. "I'm leaving Charles Town tonight."

"But, sir, I-I beg you—"

"My horse. And get yours. You're coming with me."

"I—" Gavin was speechless. Leave the city, its excitement, its parties, its open doors to young gentlemen in uni-form—leave it for a bachelor's dull plantation house where the nearest thing in petticoats lived ten miles across the swamp? He'd had enough of that back home on the Waccamaw. (Gavin had been raised by a brother and had grown up a wild hellion in buckskins. Charles Town was life, and though he still had a thing or two to learn of polish, he'd been accepted by virtue of his recklessness and the James blood in him.)

Gavin straightened, clicked his heels together. There was his company to look after, and there was fighting ahead. The colonel must be mad. "Sir, I beg to remind you that I am an officer in the militia and that I cannot possibly leave my company at this critical time."

"Captain James, seh," the colonel answered softly, "I beg to remind you that I am your superior officer. I order you, seh, to do as I say without another moment's delay!"

Gavin said no more. With disappointment bitter in him, and uneasiness heavier in his mind, he and the colonel's servant helped the colonel in-to his clothes and onto his saddle, and rigged a sling from the pommel so the broken leg could ride the easier. Sir Henry's men held every ferry on the Ashley and with a strong sea coming in, the mile-wide Cooper was too rough to be crossed. Gavin was astonished to learn that His Majesty's Dragoons had not only taken over the Dorchester highway, but controlled nearly all of Charles Town Neck. Only the Cooper River road remained open.

Sir Henry had evidently not deemed this road worthy of notice. It ran down through marsh and thickets of sweet myrtle, hip-deep in muck from the spring rains. Gavin cursed it and went floundering ahead to pick the way. Alone he would have used the main route, and devil take whomever he met.

But this was vinegar to him. Give him his company now, a free hand, and he'd mop up the

highway soon enough. Instead he was sneaking away by the side door, running, playing nursemaid to a man who had evidently lost all reason. Lincoln was right. There'd been no sense in leaving McQueen's. Leaving Charles Town was even more ridiculous.

Oscar, the colonel's Negro, barked at him once to slow down, for the colonel's sake, and added that the road may have been left open as a trap. Gavin looked back, stifling oaths and feeling his neck burn. In the clear starlight he could see the colonel's white horse sliding through muck and water with a queer, halting walk as if he knew every movement brought pain. The colonel rode without a murmur, hands braced on the saddle and chin on chest; he seemed crushed and entirely oblivious of himself. Oscar, a little man like his master, rode beside him, scolding the horses and scolding McQueen, the night and the sucking mud. Gavin swallowed suddenly.

There was a pounding off to his left where Sir Henry's men were probably placing mortars, and for awhile he traveled warily; but the way remained clear, and after an hour he heard only the frogs shrilling.

THE FALSE dawn had come when they reached the St. James parish road. They had seen no one. Gavin dozed. The salt marshes and the war lay behind, one eternal, the other already a part of yesterday. He was speculating on the dullness that lay ahead when the roar of the colonel's pistol brought him violently back to the present.

The next hour until dawn was something he never remembered clearly, for it only presaged a black tide that was to sweep every former thought from his mind. He saw the road ahead blocked with the vague, cross-belted figures of horsemen, heard the hoarse shouts of still others closing in behind, and slogging hoofbeats in the mud. A trap, certainly, and no way out of it.

He dazedly emptied his pistol, hurled it at another rider, and then he was in a mad vortex of cursing shadows, the taste of hot blood in his mouth and his saber clanging sparks. And he thought: This is impossible; two of our own companies were stationed out here to keep the way open! What's happened to them?

He'd been praying for a fight. He fought now in bewilderment, and Oscar and the colonel fought beside him; the colonel sitting crookedly in his saddle, clubbing with his pistol while his sword parried flicking steel. Oscar a screaming lunatic with a cutlass, a crazed old hen driving hawks from a chick.

There were too many of them and the colonel should have cried for quarter. But he was in no mood for quarter that night. He cut a path ahead, barking for Gavin to come on. For Carolina. It didn't make sense then, but the name rose in Gavin's mind as it were a bright Andromeda calling. It may have been McQueen's liquor.

Gavin's saber went spinning; he roweled his horse, crashed into a dragoon, drove his fist into another's face. Ahead he caught glimpses of the colonel's thoroughbred, plunging, kicking, teeth bared like a wild thing at the other horses. Then they were through, colonel's horse a white flying bird with his tail plumed straight and the colonel an arched feather on his back.

A little man with a broken leg. It'll never knit right, thought Gavin. See, he's up in the stirrups—he'll be a cripple if he lives. But they can't catch us. We have the horses. Even Oscar's filly can throw mud in their eyes.

After awhile the colonel's horse took a ditch and vanished in the timber. It was dawn now, and when Gavin came up with him the colonel's horse was standing rigid as if he were afraid to move, and the colonel was slumped across his neck in a dead faint.

Gavin helped lift him to the ground. They were all three bleeding; Oscar, gnarled fingers trembling, went over the colonel carefully before he paid any attention to his own hurts. "Nary bad cut on 'im," he mumbled finally. "Hit his laig ail 'im most. We tote 'im over to Mis' Singleton's 'cross de bot-tom. Mebbe she loan us gig to fotch 'im home."

There was a gig at the Singletons', but no harness animals left to pull it. Colonel Tarleton, of His Majesty's horse had already seen to that. Gavin swore. It was incomprehensible—the scoundrel riding

away from the Neck when there were two good companies of cavalry under Buford and Huger out to check him.

Gavin rigged a litter with a pair of saplings which he slung between his horse and the colonel's. They started northward again. The colonel's dark face was flushed and he began talking incoherently. He raised up once, calling for his pistol and his saber, which Gav-in carried. Gavin told him he had lost his own. The colonel stared at him dazedly, eyes bloodshot. "Careless," he whispered. "We'll need them. And we'll need a whip. A whip—"

He's out of his head, wanting a whip, thought Gavin. And then Oscar, leading the way, stopped suddenly. The colonel's horse stopped, ears laid back. A roaring was in the air. It came abruptly, filling the sky and shaking it as if worlds had collided and were crashing through all eternity. A horrid, grinding, symphony of thunder.

Thunder from the fort, from the city, from Sir Henry's mortars strung all the way from James Island to the Neck. Then it doubled and trebled, reaching a pitch that could have only one meaning. Arbuthnot's fleet had come up the channel, pouring fire and hell into the city.

"Hit's startin' !" wailed Oscar. "Hit's startin'! Dey gonna take de city—dey gonna take Ca'liny !"

"Shut up" snarled Gavin.

"Dey gonna take Ca'liny; Marse Francis said dey would!"

GAVIN didn't believe it possible, not even when he read the signs and saw the colonel, feverish and hob-bling on crutches, order his plate buried and his stock hidden in the swamp. He didn't believe it even when red-coated cavalymen swept past on the road on some grim errand, and for nearly a week he and the colonel had to live in the woods. But there was no denying it when a frightened messenger from Singleton's brought final news.

Yes, the city was a wreck, and Sir Henry had what was left of it. Hun-dreds dead. Lincoln a prisoner, every continental, militiaman and citizen a prisoner. Huger? Buford? Butchered; if he wanted proof he could ride over to Biggin bridge and see the bodies of Huger's men rotting in the muck.

But he'd better not be seen in that uniform—they were hanging Whigs in Dorchester, raising companies of To-ries in every parish. The State? There wasn't any state. Carolina was again one of His Majesty's colonies, and all men of property were hurrying to sign the "Protection." It made an English-man of you, maybe, but it saved your house and your neck.

The colonel lay on a pallet on the veranda, saying nothing, something deadly and brilliant in his eyes. Gavin was thunderstruck. He stared a long time at the messenger disappearing across the fields; finally he picked up his leathern militia cap, thumbed it, dropped it, and began unbuttoning his jacket.

The colonel asked softly, "What are you doing, lad?"

"I-it's all over, sir. We-we're whipped. We can't be caught wearing these things now. I'm thinking you'd better be seeing about that Protection business."

"Captain James, seh, put on your cap!"

"There-there's no army, air. And with Buford and Huger wiped out, there's not e'en a platoon of patriots left in the entire South. For all we know, we're the only men in uniform still at liberty. And you, sir—you're a sick man!"

The colonel got up on his crutch, one fist shaking. His black eyes stabbed like poniards. "Enough of that, seh! Why in damnation do you think I made you get me out of the city that night? To sign Protection? Good God, seh !"

He hurled his crutch across the ve-randa, straightened with only his cane. "Call Oscar. Have him saddle the horses and pack bags. There's some powder and a pistol of sorts in the gun room. Get them, And put on your cap, seh!"

It was an order, and it burned through Gavin like fiery whiskey. They left, and as Gavin often said, it was with little time to spare. Even then Sir Henry's men were but a mile away, plaguing the parish, burning, taking all they could carry or drive in front of them. Food, plate, hard money; cattle, horses and niggers. They left nothing, unless it was the resisting Whigs hanging from the liveoaks. It was no longer war—it was conquest.

THE next few weeks were a night-mare to Gavin. They lived in the thickets, Gavin and Oscar foraging by night, or Gavin riding errands for the colonel. Useless errands. The colonel was ill, irrational at times, and he wanted a number of queer things. Things that could be of no earthly use to a man in hiding, who risked hanging merely by remaining armed and in uni-form. Quills and ink, powder, money, caps—leathern militia caps with those three futile words Liberty or Death stamped on the crescents. And sometimes when the fever lay upon him he called for a whip.

That last seemed dominant in his mind, an ultimate goal to which his other wants were in some way connected. Gavin brought him little news, all of which was bad. He made ink for him from pokeberries and thinking to please him, even entered the partly burned parish meeting-house one night and salvaged a few caps. And finally he brought him a whip.

The colonel seemed almost rational when Gavin banded him the whip. He looked at it strangely, swarthy and grown pale and haggard, eyes bloodshot and sunken. "This isn't the kind of a whip I wanted, lad."

Gavin slumped in the canebrake where they were hiding, throat tight and hope strangled in a black weariness. "Is it a bull whip you're after, sir?"

"If I could crack it the length of Carolina. But a little whip will do first, Gavin. One that I can snap at Sir Henry's heels, at the rear of his con-voys. It's the kind of a whip we'll have to make ourselves."

"Make ourselves-" Gavin sat up, plucking at the wiry stubble on his jaw. Then he began to sense what the other was driving at. The idea amazed him no less than the tenacity which had fostered it in the face of so much futility. A little man, a cripple...

Something unnamable welled in Gavin like a fresh spring; suddenly he was talking, planning; even daring to hope.

"There—there are my cousins, sir; I heard they were paroled home with a few of the militia officers. There's Mr. Bee and several members of the hunt, back at their country places after signing Protection. And I think I could get Ted Delancey and the Motte boys. They weren't in the city. None of 'em have much money on hand, but they've the best horse-flesh in the country hid-den in the swamps. If those will come, scores more will follow. They're drink-ing a bitter dose, sir, and all they need the right man to get them started." And leg or no leg, thought Gavin, the colonel could do it. He was the best drill-master south of Canada, and men always fought to be in his company. Gavin looked at him earnestly. Shall I go and see them, sir?"

Gravely the colonel handed him a pile of letters written on pages torn from his record book. He'd been get-ting them ready while Gavin foraged.

"Pray to God they'll come," he said.

Gavin glanced at the names. "They'll come. They're gentlemen."

The colonel grunted. "Our gentlemen do most of their fighting for hon-or. There's no point of honor involved here, and damned little glory for the dashing young bloods. Only our necks if we get caught."

"There's plenty of honor involved!" Gavin bit it out savagely. "No man worth his liquor is going to swallow Clinton's damned medicine and lose his birthright in the bargain. They say our birthright is only a bit of swamp and not worth the powder to blow it to hell. But, sir, I—"

"Your viewpoint has changed con-siderably in the last few days," commented the colonel. "But go see these gentlemen I've written to. They're our only chance."

"You're forgetting the rank and file who followed you during the Indian troubles. Faith, your name's a by-word with every settler in the tidewater!"

The little man shrugged. "They'll not fight Redcoats."

"They fought the Cherokee. They'll fight again to save their skins."

"Their skins are safe enough with Clinton; they've nothing he wants and they'll knuckle under to keep peace. It'll take money, Gavin, to call a poor man out of his field and leave his fam-ily. Hard money—not this confounded stuff." He drew a thick roll of conti-nental bills from his pocket. "Not worth

a brass shilling!"

He shook his head grimly. "No, Gavin, our only chance is to raise a small body of horse among the gentle-men. Go after them. And while you're gone I'll do an errand of my own."

"Gad, sir, I'll do your errands. You're not able to be about yet."

"I can ride, and there's one errand you can't do."

GAVIN did not guess what that errand was until he thumbed through the messages the next morning, miles away on his careful circuit of the parish. There was no note for Poyas Bee. And Poyas, richest planter this side of Middleton's, lived away over on the dangerous Camden highway where forts were going up and Sir Henry's men swarmed like ants.

Gavin made his rounds, a matter re-quiring much stealth and, as he soon found, more fortitude than he pos-sessed. At the beginning, hope had been smouldering through the defeat in him, needing only the promise of action to send it flaming. It did not flame; it slowly died and went out. He was amazed at first, when men gravely read the messages, then offered excuses or vehemently pointed out the impossibil-ity of such an enterprise. They offered continental bills, some of them; a few offered horses—if Gavin would steal them and in no way implicate the owners.

Gavin was incredulous; finally he was furious. He had no hope now, only the deep thing that still welled in him, and a biting rage that burst out of control when he cornered Ted Delancey at the latter's stables. Ted was bargaining for a deer brought in by a grizzled, dirty hunter in buckskins.

They both listened till Gavin was done. "My respects to Colonel Fran-cis," replied the handsome Ted, "but I think he's daft. What could we do with a body of horse against Clinton's thou-sands? Play hide-and-seek in the swamps with 'em? Pick off a man or two and a bit of baggage—for what? Who'll feed us, give us powder? The beggars have got the state; they'll soon have every colony back. If I so much as joined, they'd burn the house, take everything we have, and confiscate the land. You know how the Crown treats a rebel. Father signed the Protection; we've got to live up to the terms and not bear arms against the Crown. I don't like it any more than you, but—"

It was a sensible argument, but in that moment Gavin remembered a little man tossing in a fever and calling for a whip. The hard, bright look in his eyes when he brought him one. "What'll you do," snarled Gavin, "when Clinton orders you to crawl into a red uniform?"

"He'll not do it! The Protection em-phatically said—"

"To hell with the Protection! Doesn't Ca'lina mean anything to you?"

"We lived under Crown rule once. I'll do it again to save my home!"

Gavin hit him. The blow came up from his knees, and behind it was all the rankling bitterness in his heart. It brought a chuckle from the watching hunter; Gavin did not hear him. He whirled without looking back, got into his saddle and rode off, eyes blue ice and his jaws so white with rage that the freckles stood out like spatters of brown earth. He galloped down the main highway without knowing it, and it was not until he had almost ridden into a patrol of merrily singing dragoons that he realized where he was. They gaped at him in disbelief; Gavin hurled curses at them, sent a pistol ball through a plumed cap, and dared them to follow as he roweled his horse over a fence and raced through the pines. He stopped once, wishing they would follow, and swore when he saw that none of their mounts could negotiate five feet of rails.

BACK at the canebrake the next evening he found the colonel hunched over Oscar's tiny fire, slowly shredding a heap of continental bills and dropping them into the embers. Their eyes met, read mutual failure. Gavin sat down, saying nothing for a long time.

He didn't ask about Poyas Bee. He could vision Poyas, contrite, apologetic after the affair at McQueen's, heavy square face a little redder than usual. And Poyas shaking his head and grow-ing vehement white he looked out over his many acres. Poyas offering conti-nental bills and horses, perhaps, but not himself. Saying that Carolina was whipped, the thing finished, to hurry back and sign Protection

before the rascals put a brand to the house. And the colonel saying to hell with Protec-tion.

"Gentry!" Gavin. spat out. "Blast them! Their fool honor made them hold the city to the last ditch. Forgot good tactics and common sense. Their fool honor cost us every fighting man we had, and the state besides. It may cost us the country. And where's their con-founded honor now?"

"Signed away on a worthless scrap of paper, Gavin."

The colonel struggled upward, leaned heavily oh his cane, and slowly straightened He seemed weary unto death, but his mouth was a trap and his eyes chipped jet. "My horse," he snapped suddenly at Oscar. "We're leaving."

Gavin looked at him dully, wondering -what strange brand of courage still lashed him on. "Where to, sir?"

"North, Gavin. The governor escaped and carried his office in his chaise. We'll see him; perhaps he has money and can help us raise men. If not, we'll go on, find men somehow."

Find men somehow! We're finished, thought Gavin. He was standing there, the hopelessness eating through him, when he heard a stealthy sound of footsteps in the canebrake, then abrupt silence. He whirled, pistol out. "Who's there?"

"Hit's friends, Capt'n." A figure moved into the firelight—the hunter he had seen at Delancey's stables. Following him was a second figure, a boy, with another man behind him.

The hunter's darting eyes took in the camp and came to a rest on the colonel. He stood ill at ease, rubbing a big raw-boned hand along the polished surface of his rifle. Gavin wondered curiously what could have brought the fellow here. They had no money to buy game.

"Howdy, Cunnel," mumbled the tall man. "I reckon you all done forgot me."

The colonel started at him; suddenly he hobbled forward and took his hand. "Crabstick!" he whispered. "You old swamp devil, I haven't seen you since the Cherokee days. Can Hanna still shoot?"

The man chuckled. "She's allus been good at hittin' red. I reckon as how she'd be as fair on a red coat as a red skin, if'n she had the chance!"

The colonel could only look at him.

"Sho, I hyeared tell as how you was wantin' men, so I brung a couple. Step up, Denny; an' you, Mac. Meet the cunnel. My boy here," he nodded to the youngster standing spraddle-legged and owlsh, one jaw bulged with a quid of tobacco. "My Denny, he's fo'teen, but he's kilt a bar at a hunnerd paces. Thar's a sight more O' us said they'd come, soon's they kin lay in a bit O' cawn."

The colonel struggled to speak. "I-I've no money, gentlemen. It'll have to be without pay until I can raise some."

Crabstick's big paws tightened on the rifle. "I been offered pay. T'other side." He spat. "May be the quality don't see hit, but to my way O' thinkin' thar's a heap more'n money on my mind now. Our wemmin folk says as how they kin make out, if'n we'd come home some to watch the fields. So we're all j'inin' up with ye, Cunnel. An' up Williamsburg way thar's nigh on fo' score Irish Whigs a-hidin' an' a-cussin' in the swamps. Yo' name's been men-tioned as the only fittin' man to take 'em over. Jest give 'em time to git their bile up, an' they'll be askin' fer ye."

Gavin looked at the colonel, grinning. "Your whip, sir. And it looks like it'll be made of the best rawhide."

It was of rawhide, as Gavin said, but it finished with a velvet coat. For, before the week was out, Ted Delancey came, looking grimly at Gavin, and with him were the Motte boys and Poyas Bee. Poyas was without his wig now, and quite bald under his tricorne; he brought his nigger, several blooded horses, a ham and two demijohns of rum—the only things he'd managed to gather together before His Majesty's dragoons arrived with a summons for service. Sir Henry's Protection had grown a set of teeth; gentlemen who had signed it must don His Majesty's red or suffer accordingly.

"Damned insolent scoundrels!" Poyas ground out. "They can trick me and strip me, but they'll not take my honor. I'll talk' to them next over a rifle barrel! Forgive me, Francis, for being a blind fool."

The colonel clasped his hand.

Poyas opened a demijohn. "We'll drink on it, Francis." He stopped, looked around him. "We'll all drink on it," he added gravely, thereby destroy-ing the barrier between settler and gentry. "Come, boys:

to Colonel Francis Marion! May God help him and his Brigade!"

The colonel glanced down at his leg, still sore and knitting badly. It would never be straight. He raised his noggin. "To the Brigade—and to Alec McQueen!" The last phrase was devout and barely audible.

Gavin heard it, and he remembered it. But for a locked door and a broken leg, the thing might never have been. He did not forget it during the long black months that followed, when they lashed their pitiful few on convoy and patrol, when they starved and used pebbles for bullets, and watched hope die with the death of a relief army.

There was no hope, but the colonel drove them on with his quiet voice the steel in his eye; a rawhide lash he cracked with incredible force down the line of Sir Henry's forts and. to the very gates of Charles Town. Men broke parole to ride with him; other men whispered his name from the Floridas to Quebec, and cursed in London.

But you can find all that in American History book. The in. thing is that it all started at McQueen's. And it only seems like yesterday because I got it from my grandfather' grandfather and on a foggy night it the swamps beyond our town I some times can see the crippled little "Swamp -Fox" riding at the head of his motley rebels on a fine white horse and I can see him swing his cutlass so the moon glints on it. He's crying, or he's moan-ing "Ca'liny" ...But I'm imaginative. He's just a name—Colonel Francis Marion—in the history books to you; and, as I say, it's all like yesterday to me, and it may be the wind in the pines I hear.